



Going backward from reform to reaction

By CELIA ZITRON

Every January, The New York Times publishes an Annual Education Review, highlighting the major developments and trends in education of the preceding year. The most recent appeared on Jan. 11, 1973.

Over the last three years, the Annual Review shows a rapid backward movement from a search for necessary change to budgetary strangulation to a solidification of reaction.

In the 1971 Annual Review, the main head is "Reform Drive Now Key Issue in Education." There is, at least, a recognition of the main problems, especially in the schools of our big cities.

In one of the main articles, "Restructuring Deemed An Urban Imperative," Harvey B. Scribner, then the new Chancellor of the New York City public schools, stated: "The schools of big-city America are in serious trouble. The educational problem is, exemplified most readily by the record of academic failure that is built every day by large numbers of urban youth—a chronic trouble historically." And he poses the question: "Does school disruption, for example, demand more security guards -- or better and more varied educational programs and improved counseling services, as well as schools (and a society) that more clearly practice all the rules of democracy?"

Within one year, the emphasis changed completely. In the Annual Education Review of Jan. 10, 1972, the main burden of the lead articles was the budgetary crisis. There were such articles as "The Economic Squeeze on Education Is Pervasive;" "Cutbacks in the City (New York) May Be Only a Prelude to More Economies."

The tone was not yet entirely hopeless. In the wake of court rulings in several states that the prevailing system of financing the schools was unconstitutional because it discriminated against children in poor communities, there were discussions on finding ways for a more equitable way to support education. There was even an optimistic article headed: "Wide U.S. Aid In Prospect."

But there was already an ominous note in an article by Daniel P. Moynihan. Discussing the findings of a

tunity," he said categorically: "The evidence (of the effect of expenditure on education) seems to be that there is so little effect as for practical purposes to be naught..."

That is one of the main notes in the latest Annual Review. The other is an all-out racist attack on attempts to upgrade the educational program for Black children.

One of the lead articles, "School Role in Poverty Contested," takes off from Inequality, by Christopher Jencks, the latest publication of the Harvard study group. Of past attempts at reform, the writer of the article, Robert Reinhold, says: "The liberal, egalitarian notion that lack of good schooling tends to reinforce the barriers between economic classes has fueled the drive to desegregate and reform the American school system."

But, Reinhold explains, Inequality concluded that "insofar as education was supposed to close this gap, the cost was probably not worth it...or more simply, if you want to eliminate inequality then give the poor money, not education." (See Daily World, Dec. 16, 1972, p. 6)

It was not to promote socialism, which Jencks claims to advocate, that the Carnegie Foundation financed the study, or that the book is being vigorously promoted. The book's effect has been to put in doubt the usefulness of financial support of education.

As Reinhold puts it: "If education doesn't matter, their (Jencks' and his colleagues') argument goes, then is it worth while to pump a great deal of money into desegregation and efforts to improve education?"

The other lead article, headed "Lag Found/ In Tempo/ Of School Reform," does not bother to cloak its message in socialist phraseology.

Its author is Irving Kristol, now editor of The Public Interest and professor of Urban Values at New York University. In the 1950s he was editor of Encounter, exposed as a CIA operation, along with its sponsor, the Congress for Cultural Freedom. (See Daily World, March 3, 1972, p. 6.)

Here is what Kristol says about the failure of our schools to educate Black children: "Thus, the single thing that has happened to our ghetto schools was the increase

in the school-leaving age after World War II. The second most important thing was increase in the minimum wage. Together these reforms insured that a great many vigorous and robust young men and women were sentenced to confinement in the schools.

"The lack of discipline in our ghetto schools," Kristol continues, "which prevents almost any learning from going on, is a new problem because the undisciplined student is now in school, whereas he used to work at some low-paying job, or at any rate committed his acts of juvenile delinquency outside the school rather than within it. To say, as many do, that our schools 'have failed to cope' with these young men and women is to say the absurd..."

All this is not to say that the reformers of 1970 proposed sufficiently basic or sufficiently consistent changes, or that budgets were ever sufficient to carry out even the scattered reforms which were undertaken.

But there is a very real and very ominous difference between Scribner's recognition of the problems of children in the ghetto-schools and Kristol's shameless proposal to throw out Black students, to consign them to low-paying jobs or to juvenile delinquency outside the school. There is also a difference between the earlier concern about budget crises and the conclusion that expenditures on schools are nothing but a waste.

In an article in the 1971 Annual Education Review, Leonard Butler, education writer for The New York Times, writing about decentralization and the Open Admissions policy of the City University of New York, recognized that the demonstrations of Black and Puerto Rican parents and students had brought about these changes.

That would appear to be the answer. Renewal efforts to get money for the schools, to make necessary changes, to stop the educational deprivation of poor children, of Blacks and Puerto Ricans, will come with a renewal of large-scale demonstrative actions by parents, teachers, and students. The Vietnam war and get on with the education of our children.